

Minutes  
Pro Parks Levy Oversight Committee  
July 24, 2006

**Committee Members Present:** Russ Brubaker, Chair; Alan Alabastro, Gwen Colwell, Doug Dunham, Don Harper, Terry Holme, Philippe Jeoffroy, Cheryl Klinker, Joyce Moty, Sonia Singh

**Staff:** Ken Bounds, Superintendent; Carol Everson, Korie Voorheis, Susan Golub, Erin Devoto, Michael Shiosaki, Catherine Anstett

**Committee Business:** The meeting agenda was approved, as were the minutes from the June 26, 2006 meeting.

**Public Comments:** There were none.

**Program Update Briefing: Natural Area Crew and Tree Crew**

Mark Mead, Parks Senior Urban Forester, briefed the Committee on two Levy funded programs: the Natural Area Crew and the third Tree Crew.

**The Natural Area Crew** is a new program that started with the Levy. While Parks has coordinated significant volunteer work in natural areas, this is the first time a crew has been funded to work in them: it is the first time we are able to provide maintenance in the urban forest. Examples of the type of work the crew addresses include clean ups of encampments, trail work and environmental stewardship.

Funding for the crew is \$173,000 per year which pays for 3 full time laborers. They have addressed 330 work orders over 4 years and coordinated Saturday volunteer efforts. Through their work, over 9.6 acres have been restored, with over 75,000 plants and trees planted. The crews work with 60 "Friends of" groups and with the Green Seattle Partnership. The Partnership, whose fund raising efforts are led by the Cascade Land Conservancy, has a goal to restore 2,500 acres in 20 years.

Superintendent Bounds noted that when Parks first purchased greenbelts and natural areas we tried to get new facility costs included in the budget in order to maintain them, but were not successful. Recognizing the need to work in the forests in order to protect them, the Levy was used to fund this crew.

Russ Brubaker asked if a single three person crew was sufficient to do the work and to work with volunteers. Mr. Mead responded no, one crew was not sufficient, that 6-7 crews are needed to support the efforts envisioned at the level of the Green Seattle Partnership. Cheryl Klinker asked if the crews worked with the Conservation Corps. Mr. Mead responded that at this time there was no capacity for this, but they are working towards this goal. They do work with Earthcorps.

Mr. Alabastro asked for clarification of where in the Levy the funding was, and Mr. Mead responded that it is from the Environmental Stewardship Program category. Ms. Moty noted that the funding will be gone after 2008. Mr. Jeoffroy asked whether the program had any corporate sponsors. Mr. Mead responded that they have successfully leveraged 2-3 times the Levy budget with grants and sponsorships.

**The Tree Crew** is a 3<sup>rd</sup> crew, equal to 4 full time positions, that adds capacity to the 2 crews that are funded by the City's General Fund. Funding is approximately \$310,000 annually. Mr. Mead noted that there are about 100,000 trees in parks. With this 3<sup>rd</sup> crew, for the first time Parks is able to provide preventive maintenance, whereas before the 3<sup>rd</sup> crew was added we were just able to respond to hazards. Inspection and pruning has been accomplished in 45 developed parks. One measure of tree maintenance is the pruning cycle: with the 3<sup>rd</sup> crew the pruning cycle has been from once per 26 years to once per 18 years. One of the pruning/maintenance goals is to make it look like work was never done.

The tree crews respond to 1,600 calls per year and 4,000 work orders. Part of the Levy funds in this program support an Urban Forest Crew Chief who is able to provide supervision and work load management for the crews.

Mr. Harper asked what would happen after the Levy expires and Parks goes back to 2 tree crews, and wondered if any planning was underway for this. Mr. Mead responded that with the additional funding, Parks has established a reporting system that will improve tree management, even after the 3<sup>rd</sup> crew is gone. Responding to a question from Ms. Moty, Mr. Mead thought that the pruning cycle would be about once per 22 to 24 years post Levy.

Mr. Alabastro asked what percentage of Parks trees were near the end of their life cycle. Mr. Mead stated that Parks did not have a specific tree inventory, but estimate that 20-25% are at the end of their life cycle. An example is Denny Park where the trees are 60 to 80 years old.

Ms. Singh asked about benefits the City gets from good tree maintenance. Mr. Mead responded that the City estimates \$23-\$35 in benefits per tree. Benefits include water retention, clean air, aesthetics and quality of life benefits. The cost to plant and maintain one tree is about \$500, including purchasing, planting, establishment and watering.

Superintendent Bounds pointed out that the Urban Forest Master Plan lays out a recommended pruning and maintenance cycle and goals for tree canopy coverage. The Plan will be finished next month and available for public review.

### **Fund Balance Briefing**

Erin Devoto, Parks Director of Planning and Development, began the briefing on fund balances by noting that the briefing at tonight's meeting is to provide the Committee with information; in September staff will ask the Committee for direction on this issue.

Superintendent Bounds noted that the basis for this discussion was established at the June meeting during Michael Shiosaki's Development Projects update briefing, when projects were mentioned that may need additional funding.

Korie Voorheis, Parks Capital Improvement Program manager described the inflation allowance that was provided by the Levy for projects in the Neighborhood Parks and the Playfields and Facilities categories. The inflation allowance is allocated depending on when a project starts and its budget. Superintendent Bounds stated the money for the inflation allowance comes from conservative original budget estimates, and schedule changes: when projects start later than originally anticipated more interest is earned for the Levy fund. The money has gone out slower than was assumed, resulting in higher interest earnings. In addition, there have been project savings and a lower inflation rate in the early years of the Levy.

Five options regarding how to disperse the fund balances were presented by Ms. Devoto for discussion at this meeting and recommendation at the September meeting. They are:

- **Option 1:** Continue to allocate funds from the program balances on an as needed per project basis.
- **Option 2:** Determine an amount to allocate for unanticipated inflation to be added to uncompleted projects.
- **Option 3:** Add some amount of funding to named development projects that have been recently acquired for new park development.
- **Option 4:** Allocate all fund balances at the end of the levy to a third round of Opportunity Fund projects.
- **Option 5:** Some combination of options 1-4.

Regarding these options, Mr. Brubaker asked whether citizens involved with development projects already completed, where the project scope had to be scaled back due to budget constraints, were asking Parks for additional funds; and if so, would Parks consider allocating fund balance to these projects. Ms. Devoto responded that this could be done – that a second project could be created to supplement completed projects. She noted that this would open the door to a very wide number of projects and asked what criteria would be used to choose completed projects to reopen.

In this regard, Doug Dunham asked how many project scopes were drastically reduced to meet budget. Michael Shiosaki, Pro Parks Levy Development Projects Manager, responded that this is difficult to assess because the project scopes were created to fit the budget allocated by the Levy to the project. Effort was made to not increase citizen expectations beyond what the budget would provide. Also, the project descriptions in the Levy were very vague. Superintendent Bounds noted that projects have met the intent of the Levy, but in some cases didn't do everything that people wanted. He also stated that recent construction inflation has been much higher than estimated, causing a problem for

projects scheduled later in the Levy. Ms. Devoto cited the example of the California Substation project which had 3 bids at \$700,000 when the project budget is \$200,000.

Mr. Dunham asked whether Parks could assign a weight to later projects, evaluating what impact the higher inflation has. Ms. Devoto responded that this could be done.

Don Harper asked if it might be smart to use the fund balance for a 3<sup>rd</sup> round of the Opportunity Fund, wondering whether this might provide impetus for future levies. Gwen Colwell responded that it may not be good to advertise that there is a surplus as it might indicate that too much money was collected. Responding to a concern that there might not be sufficient funds in the Levy for development of the urban village acquisition projects, Mr. Dunham remarked that perhaps the fund balance could be allocated to these projects. Regarding the idea of a 3<sup>rd</sup> round Opportunity Fund, Mr. Brubaker expressed concern that there would be sufficient funds for the process if money were set aside for inflation.

### **2005 Annual Report Briefing**

Catherine Anstett described the 3 reports that are required by the Levy Ordinance:

1. Annual Report, the subject of tonight's briefing;
2. Mid-term Report; and
3. Annual Newsletter.

The Annual Report is the Oversight Committee's document and is transmitted from the Committee Chair to the Mayor and City Council, and it is posted on the internet: <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/proparks/levycommittee.asp>.

Ms. Anstett reviewed the report and accepted recommendations for changes from the Committee. Members will have 2 weeks to submit written suggested changes to Ms. Anstett before the document becomes final.

**Mr. Dunham moved, with a second from Ms. Moty, that the 2005 Annual Report, as amended by the Committee, be approved. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.**

It was decided that the Committee would request time on the agenda of the City Council's Parks Education Libraries and Education Committee to present the 2005 Annual Report.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00.